The Ideological Commissar and the Institutionalization of Indoctrination

Insights from the Communist Experience

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T he social organization of indoctrination and propaganda is a well-known and yet a very little understood phenomenon. It is a commonplace to note that political systems have embedded into their structures distinctive organizational arrangements whose function is to propagate, monitor, enforce, and manage the ideological views that have a central role in both defining and supporting those systems. In most cases, these organizational units operate in the shadow of routine. In fact, that is precisely a mark of liberal democratic regimes: the latent, toned-down nature of these ideological vectors. Yet, in other types of political systems they occupy a pivotal, manifest position. They are intrinsically intertwined with the very fundaments and operations of those systems.

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When that happens, one of the main features of these institutional arrangements is that they rarely stand alone. They operate by penetrating and planting their units within other existing organizations. And thus, almost all other institutions and organizations, each having its distinctive social role and position in the system, come to be monitored, censored, and managed on their ideological dimension, from inside, by these political-ideological units and agents. At the same time, these units are coordinated through an overarching (national and sometimes even international) systemic structure.

Thus, the entire institutional configuration of the political and social system is pervaded and altered. Distinctive patterns start to emerge. At that point, we know that we are already dealing with a peculiar form of political system or regime: in it, a set of supreme ideas and values, taking a particular ideological form, has come to occupy such a position that they are considered the ultimate and exclusive drivers and regulators of social life. Those in charge of interpreting and guarding those values and ideas, as well as correctly applying them in practice, gain a dominant social position. And all that has, obviously, major institutional and governance implications.

Probably the easiest to grasp and the best-known illustration of this type of political phenomenon is the institution of the *political commissar*, operating under various names and forms in communist regimes. The standard definitions describe it as an official of the Communist Party, especially in the Soviet Union or China, responsible for political education and indoctrination and for reinforcing the loyalty of the military to the government. The standard function of the army in any political system is to defend the country from external and internal threats. The function of the commissar was to make sure the army of a country that had turned communist was internalizing the communist worldview, mindset, and interpretation of world events, and that it was loyal in thought and action to the Communist Party's aims. It was the deepest-reaching conduit (in socio-psychological and indoctrination terms) between each army unit and the Communist Party, a party that was the political, ideological, and organizational center of the system and the ultimate standard in the interpretation of the communist vision and ideology. That role required engaging in a continuous monitoring, indoctrination, and guidance process, always following the lines given "from the center."

The political commissar is an excellent illustration not only of the nature of this type of political-ideological practice but also a reminder of the fact that its model could be extended (and indeed was extended in the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe) to other social institutions beyond the army. From factories to schools, universities, and hospitals, under communism almost all organizations had at one point or another a special ideological office or agent, by now called an *ideological worker*—different from those of the Communist Party, the political police, or the informers of the political police. This office was responsible for directing and supervising ideological training—indoctrination—as well as for monitoring and enforcing

the official worldview and interpretation of current events in all those institutions. The result in all Soviet or Soviet-inspired regimes was that it became "generally impossible to delimit precisely the field of propaganda. It is only one aspect of a total program of action which ranges from primary education to industrial and agricultural production, and which encompasses all literature, art and leisure. The entire life of the citizen becomes the object of propaganda" (Domenach 1951, 272). We come, thus, to identify the presence of an office (or at least an agent, the ideological worker) that exercises this function in most domains of organized activity in communist regimes. Among them—as one may expect—the institutions of education, especially higher education, were the object of a special attention.

These elementary observations about the political commissar or ideological worker and its functions in communist regimes give a clear indication of the nature and importance of the phenomenon explored in this article, irrespective of the label under which it is known in real life or in the scholarly literature. Indeed, such an accentuated institutionalization of the ideological element and its associated structures and mechanisms is a feature of a large class of regimes and political systems, being a recurring phenomenon in history. And yet, the historical evidence shows that although that function may be present in any political system, there are some systems in which it grows and spreads to become the defining feature of the system (Thompson 1999; Cunningham 2002; Taylor 2013). And when it comes to that, its strongest and most extreme form has manifested in modern times, so far, in communist regimes. That means that, in our attempt to understand the circumstances and implications surrounding the accentuated institutionalization of the ideological element, one of the most fruitful ways to start is to use its communist avatar as an empirical and historical reference point.

This article is a contribution to the study of these institutional phenomena. Let us call it for now the institution of the *political* or *ideological commissar* or *ideological worker*, though as one can easily see, the function and its institutional and organizational embodiments have materialized and continue to materialize in recent history under different shapes and names. The objective of the article is to contribute to a better understanding of these apparently straightforward yet, in fact, complex and little understood institutional processes and their associated practices of indoctrination and social control.

The literature about totalitarian and communist ideology and propaganda (including indoctrination and brainwashing) is rather vast (Gleason, 1997; Lifton, 2012). Yet, at a closer look, the scholarly treatment of the ways the ideological function gets organized and embedded in institutionalized structures reveals massive lacunae. As one becomes more familiar with the topic, it becomes clearer and clearer that the issue is not just about the proverbial "gaps in the literature" that are to be filled. The reality is that, in order to put this research line on a solid footing, one needs to start with very basic, foundational questions: How do we conceptualize and theorize about the social organization of ideology? How should

we think methodically—in theoretically and empirically informed ways—about the institutionalization of indoctrination and propaganda? What is the theoretical apparatus best fitted for this task? What are the best ways to document and study the specific domains of institutionalization of indoctrination such as, for instance, the way it gets inserted and implemented in education systems? This article is an attempt to outline several responses to these and similar questions. Its main focus will be on the basic problem of conceptualization: What are the most constructive ways to conceptualize and theorize about the social and political instrumentation of ideology in regimes or systems that assume that a historical mission of salvation or radical transformation is the stringent organizing and legitimizing principle of their very existence?

In the article, I use communism as a historical and empirical reference in order to develop a series of exploratory insights, both regarding the phenomenon itself and regarding the alternative and converging conceptual frameworks to be used in its analysis and interpretation. With this end in view, the article is structured around three modes of conceptualizing the phenomena of interest, each pertaining to a level of analysis: (a) the political system/regime typology perspective, at the macro or systemic level; (b) the functionalist perspective, at the mezzo level; and (c) the organizational perspective, at the micro level. The intellectual cartography and the exploratory investigations advanced in the article have thus to be read as a propaedeutic for better engaging analytically with the problem of indoctrination and its institutionalization. The ultimate objective is to contribute to a broader comparative understanding of the institutionalization of indoctrination and propaganda in a variety of systems, regimes, and circumstances, including but also going beyond the standard case studies (communist, National Socialist, and fascist).

The Political System Typology Perspective: Conceptualizing Ideocracy and Totalitarianism

The system-level view is a primary, general mode of conceptually framing for analytical purposes the phenomenon of the institutionalization of ideology as part of a larger social and institutional whole. The ideological dimension (belief systems, values, and doctrines that define, legitimize, and frame institutional structures) is essential for describing and analyzing any political system or governance regime. Isolating and analytically disentangling the particular function and weight that particular forms of ideologies and their institutionalization have in governance systems, leads—via comparative analysis—to the identification of the particular types of political systems in which they play a preeminent role, with profound implications for the institutional and incentive structures. Let us take a closer look now at this approach through a set of conceptual lenses that allow us to penetrate beyond the surface, and identify underlying principles, patterns, and structures.

Bernholz's Model of Ideocracy

In his path-breaking book *Totalitarianism, Terrorism and Supreme Values*, Peter Bernholz (2017) has labelled as *ideocracies* the systems in which the ideological factor is institutionalized as a supreme principle of government. Ideocracies, he argues, have sufficient distinctive features to establish themselves as a class in itself, different in nature (not just in degree), from other types of political systems. One of the most important features of Bernholz's contributions is an original theoretical framework, linking ideocracies to totalitarianism. The two, he contends, are intrinsically related. In fact, they are phases of the same process.

Crucial to his argument is the notion of *supreme values*, a combination of ideas, images, and doctrines that claim absolute truth and historical validity. The installment of supreme values, believed to be absolute and nonnegotiable, is the essential element setting this process into motion. Once a political system has made supreme values the centerpiece of its institutional and governance structure, a series of intrinsically interrelated developments are set into motion. In Bernholz's words, "the invention and introduction of an ideology with supreme values is a necessary condition for the development of a totalitarian regime" (2017, vii). Yet, it is not a sufficient condition. Full-blown totalitarianism is made possible only when the power of the state is mobilized in support of the ideology.

Building on these observations, Bernholz introduces an analytically illuminating distinction: regimes based on ideologies that have reached their aims do not employ massive coercion and terrorism, because their respective populations have already accepted the behavior and beliefs implied in the supreme ideology. He calls these regimes *mature ideocracies*. In contrast, *totalitarian* regimes are systems that still have not managed to impose the beliefs and behaviors demanded in the logic of the supreme ideology. The relationship between ideocracy and totalitarianism is summarized in the following way: "A totalitarian regime is an ideocracy which has not yet reached the aims implied by its supreme values and which tries to pursue them with the spiritual and secular power available after it has gained domination of a state" (Bernholz 2017, 2).

Thus Bernholz is able to construct not only a taxonomy but also the beginnings of a theory that explains the dynamics and transformation of such systems. He creates a framework within which one could theoretically situate the conditions and factors that may lead—in specific circumstances—to totalitarian regimes, as well as those leading to the transformation and breakdown of such regimes. Using this framework, Bernholz further constructs a series of models that capture the logic, formal features, and properties of the systems operating on the totalitarianism–ideocracy continuum.

Bernholz's work introduces, thus, a fresh perspective that links his theory to the traditional literature on totalitarianism but also departs from that literature in substantive and challenging ways. He notes that the fact that the supreme values may

differ from one system to another in very material ways, as regarding their content, does not mean that this heterogeneity of content precludes the construction of a general ideal type of ideocracy. Ideocracies have an underlying structure derived precisely from their ideas-centered feature. What matters is that, irrespective of the content of beliefs, they have a certain form and function, certain general properties, that have significant social consequences. Among those properties, two are axiomatically preeminent. First, all supreme values are, at least according to the underlying creed, lexicographically preferred to all other aims. Second, they are all considered to be absolutely true (Bernholz 2017, 4–5). With that, the door toward any pluralism in a real and significant degree gets closed, ceases to be an option, in any system that embraces supreme values as foundational governance principles. That, obviously, not only restricts the range of the set of political institutions that could be adopted, but also induces certain features in the regular social institutions.

In addition to the belief in the absolute truth of supreme values around which the social world should be organized (a belief implying the attitude of sacrificing everything for the sake of those values), another vital element has to be noted. Usually the ideologies of this type are associated with a message of the promise of a better life in the future. In this respect, the future is strongly contrasted to a past or present state of affairs that is considered unjust, dysfunctional, and repressive. It is not so much a precise plan or a logical argument. It is more a set of mental images of a possible future and a series of expectations that if the ideological line is followed, the "things to come" will be better. Thus, images of the future, taking in many cases utopian overtones, and their associated mindsets, become an important factor in legitimating and motivating attitudes and actions. Reasserting and reinforcing them is part and parcel of the system's operations.

All these factors have important consequences that reach to the level of institutions and governance processes. The existence and influence of a supreme-values-based, antipluralistic ideology in a society—an ideology defining the present as unjust, dysfunctional, and repressive, and offering a utopian image of the future as an alternative—sets into motion certain directions of action and paths of institutionalization, precluding others at the same time. Let us take a brief look at how some of the facets of this process unfold.

The Underlying Logic of the Ideocracy–Totalitarian Domain at Work

First of all, let us note that Bernholz's approach converges with the classical work on totalitarianism of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who insisted that doctrines that fuel totalitarianism follow a millennialist pattern, radically rejecting the existing society and embracing utopian elements (1956, 17). The total control at which totalitarian movements and regimes aim is put to the service of an ideology "dedicated to the total destruction and reconstruction of a mass society." The key element of that reconstruction is "the effort to remold and transform the human

beings under its control in the image of its ideology" (17). That gives these ideologies a quasi-religious quality as they "often elicit in their less critical followers a depth of conviction and the favor of devotion usually found only among persons inspired by a transcendental faith" (26). At the same time, modern totalitarianism, wrote Friedrich and Brzezinski "emerges as a system for realizing 'totalist' intentions in the circumstances of modern political and technical conditions" (17). Totalitarian societies appear to be exaggerations "but nonetheless logical exaggerations of the technological state of modern society" (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956, 17). In brief, the phenomena of interest to us emerge when the ideological and technological preconditions are in place, creating the space for processes fueled at their interface by a quasi-religious fervor of conviction and historical mission.

Seen from this perspective, the general features of all forms of ideocracy are derived from this logic, and seem to unfold unfalteringly, adjusting to the contextual historical and social circumstances. For instance, the imperative of converting people—fully aligning previous nonbelievers to the ideology—emerges naturally from the adherence to supreme values. Its stringencies unfold politically and institutionally, on the entire range from persuasion to coercion. Implicit in the rationale of ideocracies is the objective of converting all people to the "true creed"—or, more precisely, all those who are convertible and deserve to be converted, because some people may be open to conversion whereas others may not be. The idea that force may be needed in order to achieve these goals—and that the secular power of the state, with its legitimate monopoly of coercion, has to be used in this respect—comes naturally. If there is one and only one appropriate worldview, mindset, and value system, all the rest are deemed dysfunctional and perhaps dangerous deviations. Hence, a need to weed out bearers of inimical views and values as "deviationists."

Consequently, there are two distinct attitudes (and two institutional strategies) toward the two major social groups that are created in society by an ideocratic movement. First is the group of those already converted or convertible. This group needs to be dealt with by creating for them a specific set of institutions and organizations, out of which those dealing with the implementation of indoctrination and propaganda are vital. Second is the group of people who are not convertible, according to the supreme ideology. These people have to be suppressed or, if they are considered to be a danger, to be driven out and eliminated. In all cases, these goals require a different set of institutional arrangements. Out of the range of these institutional alternatives, the organization and implementation of public shaming, brain washing, ostracism, exclusion, and, at the extreme, forced labor camps, prisons, and extermination camps are essential (Fireside, 1979; Rosefielde 2009; Lifton 2012; Tismaneanu 2012).

And thus, the logic of supreme values and ideological behavior engenders in its social and political embodiment an entire set of predetermined institutional and organizational forms and developments. Each is calibrated to different social groups, identified as such based on their position toward the central tenets of the reigning

ideology. And it is important to add that all of this has to operate under the assumption that force may be needed in order to achieve these goals and that the secular power of the state has to be used in this respect.

Making all these factors explicit puts us in a better position to understand the features that the scholarly literature has noted regarding totalitarianism, irrespective of the definitional or theoretical nuances, and irrespective of whether the discussion is about left-wing or right-wing totalitarianism. Ideocracy presumes that the groups or social classes who are considered relevant change agents are to be constantly mobilized to combat or facilitate some global, historical trends or developments. Some of the mobilization is against backsliding, and some of it is in the direction of accelerating particular trends. This mobilization usually takes the form of actively pursuing (with a view to ostracism and purging) other classes and categories of people, defined collectively as *objective enemies* or *enemies of the cause*. For instance, using race or social origins as criteria generates various forms of totalitarian dynamics such as a *class-based* totalitarianism or a *race-based* totalitarianism.

One final example: the logic of supreme values infuses totalitarianism and advances antipluralist worldviews, expressed through a rhetoric based on formulaic utterances and conceptual dichotomies invested with normative value, purposefully constructed to obstruct distinctions, complexity, and intellectual and normative nuances. Communism and National Socialism are telling examples in this respect. But again, one may safely conjecture that this is a general feature of ideocratic totalitarianism. That vocabulary is used in generating myths, catechisms, and social events taking the form of rituals, which reinforces the cleavage between the elect, the vanguard who is on a historical or metaphysical mission, and the rest of the society. Finally and importantly, essential to all this dynamic is the use of pressure, public shaming, and organized and instrumented harassment to intimidate, stigmatize, isolate, and regiment specific targeted individuals and groups, defined on the lines described above. The validation and sometimes institutionalization of terror is in many cases contemplated and in some cases enacted.

To conclude, once we approach the phenomena from the ideocracy–totalitarianism systemic angle, in addition to creating a typology on the lines we have surveyed, we can start to trace a series of patterns that are intrinsic to these phenomena. Also, a venue for a broader comparative analysis is opened up. One last thing needs to be mentioned at this juncture: in the light of all we have discussed, the conjecture that totalitarianism, with its ideocratic aspirations, is related not just to National Socialism and communism but has specific features that emerge whenever they find a way to manifest themselves, gets strongly validated. Such emergent features undoubtedly manifest in regimes and systems that are constituted and function on bases of ideocratic aspiration, but they may manifest in other types of regimes as well.

Even more interesting, the totalitarian trends and processes do not need to take over the entire state or society to become manifest. Specific sectors, institutions, or organizations may start to operate on totalitarian lines long before the state

succumbs to the totalitarian dominance. This aspect of ideocratic totalitarianism as a creeping social phenomenon—manifesting at micro-social and micro-organizational levels—has very important implications for the ways we understand its nature and impact.

In brief, the typology of systems offers a framework for our efforts to identify, place, and understand the link between the ideological ideal, the process that this ideal sets into motion, and the institutional and organizational forms that emerge in the process, irrespective of the type of society in which the ideocratic spirit manifests itself. Let us now shift the perspective of our approach and take a look at the functional-institutional logic of ideocracy at work. As noted, although we will change the conceptual lenses, we will continue to use the historical case of communism as a source of insights and as a reference and anchor.

The Functionalist Perspective

The previous section illustrated how the prima facie functions of the institutional arrangements of ideocratic systems could be easily derived from the substantive rationale based in the ideocratic worldview. The historical evidence of communism offers ample testimony of how the *manifest functions* of these institutions could easily be derived from the ultimate aims as defined by the communist creed. The same thing may be said about National Socialism. However, in addition to that, any serious discussion has to at least explore the hypothesis of the existence of less salient functions or logics that are less evident, latent, and based on instrumental rationalities not having much to do with the ideocratic credo. Public choice models and the stratagems of statecraft and power politics offer alternative ways of interpreting the function of the institutions of interest to our study. They all bring to the fore additional facets of the phenomenon.

Before moving ahead, let us note that the functional approach works whether the ultimate values-induced goal is genuinely embraced or not. Functionalist analysis applies whether one aims to truly create a new type of human being, that is, the "multilaterally developed socialist man," for the sake of a lofty new governance system, or, alternatively, to create "the new citizen totally politicized, highly committed, and reflexively loyal to the power holders" in a logic of domination and manipulation having nothing to do with lofty goals of any kind. As Paul Hollander put it, either way, the success in this endeavor "would have opened up limitless possibilities for controlling and manipulating society" because the new man "would invariably put the interests of society (as defined by the rulers) ahead of his or her own personal interests" (Cheng 2009; Hollander 2011, 205–6). This command-and-control facet is a constant in all approaches. However, once we go beyond this basic observation and start elaborating the different lines we have been discussing, we will be able to bring to light otherwise hard-to-detect aspects and patterns. The ideology-driven and the strategic-rationality-driven institutional logics generate significantly different structures and understandings of the phenomena of interest.

Manifest Functions: A "New Man" for a "New System"

We have already established that the ideocracy logic at work, aiming to impose the ultimate absolute values and vision, has tangible institutional consequences. Let us take a closer look at how this logic unfolds. For instance, the prima facie functions of communist institutional arrangements could be derived from the substantive rationale of the Marxist worldview and its implementation. Communism, as a textbook example of ideocracy, leads very quickly to the notion that human nature has to change in order to accommodate a given or desired institutional structure. The idea of "a new man for a new system" is a natural outgrowth of this.

Its gist is concisely expressed by Che Guevara (in Silverman 1971): "To build communism . . . it is necessary, simultaneous with the new material foundations, to build the new man" (371–72). The position defined by Guevara is an inherent outgrowth of the ideocratic and totalitarian nature of Marxism, but it captures a more general pattern. As Paul Hollander remarked, "Creating the totally politicized, obedient, self-sacrificing New Man was the shared dream of totalitarian rulers" (2011, 205–6). Indeed, the idea of a "new socialist human being" is a constant in all Marxist-Leninist movements and states and is a prima facie key for understanding many of their institutions and policies (Pipes 1996; Hollander 2011, 205–6). However, *all* ideocracies sooner or later reach this extreme conclusion, embedded in their basic operating parameters, so to speak. The step from changing the "system" to changing human nature seems unavoidable and ubiquitous. As one gets closer and closer to implementing the institutional, political, and economic implications of the ideocratic programs, this ultimate totalitarian facet emerges more and more to salience (Tismaneanu 2003, 2012). The institutional arrangements to express it emerge and take root as well.

Creating a new man for a new system requires sacrifices. Again, the case of communism offers an excellent illustration. The conduit in implementing these supreme values and the lack of any hesitation regarding the social and human costs implied by the social change and economic and political schemes involved is explicitly articulated and assumed by the foremost authorities of communism. "We are reckless and we do not ask for your consideration" wrote Marx. "When it will be our turn, we will be reckless and will not palliate terrorism" (Marx in Bernholz 2017, 11). Terror, violence, and coercion are considered natural, desirable, unavoidable: "A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian event which exists," wrote Marx. "Through it one part of the population forces its will on the other part, with the help of rifles, bayonets and guns, i.e. with the most authoritarian means; and the victorious party has to make his domination durable by the terror which is infused by its arms" (Marx in Bernholz 2017, 11).

As Lenin made clear, coercion and violence are also an inherent part the new system, once the new communist power is in place: "Until the higher phase of communism has arrived, socialists ask for the most rigorous control through society and the state." The absolute, ultimate, and unmitigated nature of the process is vividly synthetized by

Lenin: "[C]lass struggle still goes on and it is our task to subordinate everything to this struggle." In a striking conclusion, Lenin takes to the ultimate implications of his unabashedly Machiavellian argument: "We also subordinate our communist morality to this task. We assert: that is moral which serves to destroy the old exploitive society and the gathering of all the workers around the proletariat" (Lenin in Bernholz 2017, 11). Social engineering by a systematic process of indoctrination and propaganda becomes ubiquitous and has to start early in life, from early childhood. However, to succeed, the Marxist creed has always to be on guard against competing beliefs, values, and worldviews. Even the language and vocabulary are purged and controlled. The "wooden language" phenomenon emerges as the officially approved, politically correct means of communication. The entire life-cycle of a citizen gets thus targeted as organizations and policies become institutionalized and operationalized at all governance levels of the communist state and in all aspects of society.

All these features provide us with an example and benchmark in assessing the ideocratic–totalitarian potential of various ideologies and movements, including potential contemporary developments in this respect. But even more important for our purposes, we have now a clearer understanding of the double institutional task of an ideocratic–totalitarian system, like the communist one, in which human nature is seen as a malleable target-variable in a grand-scale institutional and governance design. The two tasks are, on the one hand, to create the institutional structure of the new system, and on the other hand, to create an additional institutional structure, aimed at shaping, preparing, and configuring the members of the population to become as close as possible to the ideal "model of man" deemed to function optimally within and for the new system. To create a "new man" for a "new system" necessitates a mass-scale institutional application of indoctrination and social engineering.

To synthetize: the indoctrination, propaganda, and ideological-control institutions have thus a manifest and easily understood function. They are an indispensable instrument in creating the "new man." The ideocratic–totalitarian logic unfolds implacably to bring the education system to the spotlight. The communist regimes pursued the ideal new man through "heavily politicized formal education, massive doses of propaganda disseminated by the mass media, and the attempted integration of education and manual labor" (Hollander 2011, 206). The communists, with their "new society, new man" vision, could not emphasize enough in their writings the centrality of the education and indoctrination process. The necessary institutionalized link between indoctrination and the education system emerges with clarity. This is why one could never emphasize enough that on the one hand, "the failed efforts to create the New Man were among the distinctive qualities of communist one-party states" while, at the same time, "the awareness of these efforts is an integral part of a better understanding of these systems (Hollander 2011, 206).

Again, we should keep in mind that this is not related just to communism. Bernholz alerted us to a whole range of systems with features of ideocracy. The ideocratic logic requires sooner or later addressing human beings as malleable human variables.

And indeed, the malleability assumption has major implications in the practical realm when it comes to the organization of the social engineering of human beings, through political, institutional, and governance apparatuses. It looks like any ideocratic system sooner or later has to operationalize this intrinsic formal structure, irrespective of the specific belief system, values, or orientations defining what, more particularly, one should expect or desire from the "new man for the new system." And the trajectory of that logic leads unfalteringly to the education system. Regardless of how one interprets the rationale given to the efforts, one may expect that the same institutional dynamics intrinsic to all ideocratic systems and movements will manifest themselves.

To sum up, the function and the operations of the indoctrination institutions could be easily identified in the basic texts of Marxist doctrine. If one takes at face value the claims of the doctrine, then the institutional apparatus must encompass all of "real life." Their march through institutions of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe followed naturally from the ideocratic logic of the doctrines. Institutions, out of which the education system is crucial, implement the doctrinal task; their instrumental and manifest function is linearly derived from the main objective—the creation a "new system" via the creation of "new men." One may expect that all forms of ideocracy, precisely because they are intrinsically based on similar elements connected by a similar logic, would reveal similar features. By recognizing this fact, our task of identifying and analyzing these manifestations, even when they take place in fragmentary and incipient forms, is vastly improved.

Second Order Functions: Strategic Rationality and "Public Choice" Considerations

The strategic rationality and "public choice" perspective emphasizes the incentive structure and power games, as well as the social dilemmas regarding collective action as key factors that shape the structure and the functioning of the institutionalization of ideology. Applied to our topic, it takes us to the view that a totalitarian system is based on a larger and more complex portfolio of mechanisms, institutions, and practices than the basic ideological perspective implies, and one should study them not separately but as a set. Three elements are essential: coercion, incentives, and preference manipulation. This type of functionalist approach links the motivation of the dictator (or the authoritarian oligarchy) to these strategies and the relevant institutions (Wintrobe 1990). Again, in this case, the communist experience offers multiple examples, but in this specific case the phenomenon is of a more general nature, going beyond the ideocracy–totalitarianism spectrum. Hence, this section focuses on it in its generality.

From this perspective, the ideological-indoctrination apparatus is one key element of the statecraft portfolio. It may be seen as a part of a special type of coercion, carried out not against actions and behavior but against thought and speech.

Alternatively, it may be seen as pertaining to a class totally different from coercion: that of manipulation—that is to say, an instrument of preferences formation and preferences management. One way or another, tradeoffs emerge between the "instruments" in the portfolio. A mix of tools implies alternative allocations of resources and conflicting strategic decisions. In brief, this approach accepts the standard definition of totalitarian government, in which the emphasis is on the use of the government's coercive power "to transform economic and social relations, beliefs, values and psychological predispositions" (Kirkpatrick 1979; 1982, 101). Yet, it goes beyond this.

If repression and indoctrination are seen as part of a larger package of policies and strategies available to totalitarian regimes, then the factors determining the *contents* of the package and the *tradeoffs* ensuing between them are central for our understanding of how these regimes operate. The immediate implication is that the logic of repression and indoctrination is always strategic and calibrated to the factors determining the balance of power in a system. As Ronald Wintrobe (who, together with Gordon Tullock, is one of the founders of this approach) noted: "Repression is an important tool in the hands of the dictator; but just as a monopolist in the economic marketplace may try to impede . . . entry by alternative sources of supply for the purpose of raising profits from exchange, a political dictator does not repress for the sake of repression alone but in order to increase power. In political exchange, the dictator provides individuals or interest groups with public services or patronage in exchange for support" (Wintrobe 1990, 850–51).

Building on these insights, Milan Svolik (2012) takes a step further. He draws attention to the fact that authoritarian politics are shaped by two fundamental conflicts. The first is the tension between rules and ruled, that is, between the masses and the leaders. Svolik refers to the political problem of keeping under control the majority who are excluded from power as "the problem of authoritarian control." However, that is not the sole—and, in many cases, not the most important—problem. Any totalitarian or authoritarian system usually has to be run through an alliance: a coalition of elite party members, traditional elites, regional and central leaders, and military officers. Therefore, a second domain of political conflict emerges. Those allies in power sharing may challenge the top leadership anytime. This is the problem of *authoritarian power sharing*. The predominant political conflict in dictatorships, explains Svolik "appears to be not between the ruling elite and the masses but rather one among regime insiders" (2012, 2–3). Obviously, monitoring and control within the ruling class or group is essential. The institutional implications follow suit both at the practical and the analytical levels.

The models I have outlined alert us that the indoctrination and propaganda institutions at the center of our investigation may have a double role in this respect, in addition to the manifest functions related to the ideology of the new man for the new society. On the one hand, they are all obviously related to the problem of authoritarian control. On the other hand, they also have a role related to the problem of power sharing. It may be the case that although we seem to be mostly

concentrated on the first aspect (authoritarian control in relationship to the masses), what we have called the *political commissar* and *indoctrination institutions* may have a function in the second aspect of power sharing as well. These institutions may be rather important in administering the balance of power among the leaders and elites, thus contributing to the management of the problem of authoritarian power sharing. The communist purges under Stalin are a salient example in this respect.

To sum up, the functionalist perspective introduces second-order, latent functions and presents a more nuanced understanding of the nature and functions of ideology and indoctrination organizations. This way of framing the institutionalization of indoctrination illuminates how the ideological factor may be essential to the system and yet part of a set of tradeoffs. As such, it is part of a set of options in the administration of the system, and it may play several roles. The bottom line is that the autocratic strategy and the resilience and survival of the regime are dependent on the technology of censorship, propaganda, and repression, which is a reality irrespective of the particular ideological bent (left or right, socialist or national socialist) of the regime (Guriev and Treisman 2015). A combination of social engineering doctrines and the strategic utilization of doctrines and their institutionalization, as well as some unintended consequences of both, offers us a rather good set of conceptual tools for analyzing and understanding the phenomena of interest. We are thus provided with a set of conceptual lenses that could be very useful in our investigation of the structure and dynamics of real-life cases and situations.

The Organizational Perspective

Both the systemic and the functionalist perspectives are predicated on the recognition of the fact that the institutionalization of indoctrination and propaganda is an unescapable organizational phenomenon. The way people organize the operations related to the relevant functions, the organizational forms used, and their evolution in time, all matter. Focusing on organizational forms and strategies at the micro level thus offers important additional insights regarding the nature, stability, and success of ideocratic institutional designs and political systems.

Again, the communist case study presents solid support and insights to our investigation in this respect as well. In a sense, the success of Marxism is intrinsically related to the fact that communist leaders understood how to place their political practice at the forefront of the organizational revolution taking place in the twentieth century. Communism was a formidable organizational phenomenon. This reality was increasingly noticed and exposed at the very beginning of the Cold War. Scholars discovered, sometimes to their surprise, the extent to which the entire communist movement was deliberately organizationally constructed, and how organizationally effective this apparatus was (Selznick 2014). They noted, for instance, that Lenin was fully aware of the significance of the rationalization/organization movement gaining

ground first in America and then all over the world, and he was a pioneer in thinking about the implications for politics and governance.

The organization of the communist movement is fine-tuned to circumstantial evolutions with a careful understanding of the stages from radically opposing a regime to the totalitarian control of power in a new regime. Looking at the evolution in the aspect of time, one easily notices that totalitarianism (and ideocracy) comes in phases, each phase having its own organizational parameters, constraints, objectives, and dynamics. The communist strategy has been calibrated to that reality. Broadly speaking, there are two ways communism defines its stages and tactics: first, as a challenger to an existing social order and system—a logic and strategy of subversion, generating an organizational structure aligned with the objective of overthrowing a social order from the inside; second, as a dominant force, building and defending a particular form of social order and a governance system. In this case a strategy and structure of domination and consolidation through the control of national centers of power is required. In both cases specific organizational forms and practices are required.

Let us take a closer look at the first stage (or operating mode) of the Communist Party and its offensive against the status quo: the ways in which communists seek to gain control over crucial groups and organizations, in their endeavor to control modern society. Selznick, a pioneer of this approach, shows that at this first stage the communist strategy and tactics are not so much to indoctrinate the masses, or to take control of the government in the traditional revolutionary style. Instead, the objective is to control the functioning units in a society—groups such as labor unions, youth groups, the unemployed. In other words, to gradually establish influence bases in society "which will offer in turn means of moving progressively to greater conquests of power until the control of the social apparatus of a society is secured" (Blumer 1952, 630–31).

These observations are important because they help emphasize the radical differences between, on the one hand, communism as a revolutionary phenomenon and, on the other hand, communism in power. We can thus determine both the lines of continuity and those of discontinuity between the two stages or avatars of communism in action. At the same time, we may start to discern the difference in organizational forms within the same ideocratic–totalitarian movement as it evolves through stages, as well as the lines of organizational continuity between stages. Let us illustrate both this aspect and how the principle of specialization and division of labor operates at the organizational level in the institutionalization of indoctrination in the case of the communist revolution. The idea of social organization of indoctrination gains an additional facet, if framed in this perspective.

There is no better way to illustrate all these elements than the organization and workings of "the method of practical action" as developed by the communists when it came to propaganda and ideological work. The "method of practical action" is so profoundly influential and captures such a profound pattern that it is essential

to understand all contemporary forms of indoctrination and propaganda. In one of the most penetrating and succinct analyses of the time, J. M. Domenach (1951) explained that Lenin realized early on that consciousness must be awakened, educated, and mobilized into the battle beyond the narrow workplace and employment relations; that is to say, that the transformation of the workplace and employment relations was a necessary but not a sufficient condition. An elite group of professional revolutionaries, "the conscious vanguard of the proletariat" was to be created, as instruments for an organizational structure targeting the entire polity and society. The genius of the organization is demonstrated by a closer look at its activities. Propaganda and indoctrination are not a merely repetitious Pavlovian exercise using images and mantras. In fact, the entire procedure is ingeniously structured around two pillars; it can be reduced to two fundamental forms: political revelation (or denunciation) and slogans (or watchwords) (Domenach 1951, 266). Each has its own logic and implies specific mechanisms and practices. Understanding them helps us to understand a general feature of ideocratic–totalitarian movements and doctrines and to develop a comparative approach. At the same time, this understanding gives us surprising insights into the contemporary propaganda and indoctrination landscape.

Following Domenach's classical take, let us start with the so-called political revelations. The origins of the technique were in Marx, who had already noted that "it is necessary to render genuine oppression even more severe by adding to it the consciousness of oppression, and to make shame even more shameful by throwing upon it the light of publicity" (Marx in Domenach 1951, 266). Lenin took that insight and systematized it into a method of "organized political revelations in every sphere" (Domenach 1951, 266). The "revelations" were strategic debunking of the ruling classes, pointing methodically to their selfish interests. Embracing all spheres of social life, these denunciations were presented by Lenin as necessary and fundamental for the preparation of the masses for their revolutionary activity (Domenach 1951). The exercise was predicated on the assumption that there was a façade (a veil) of ideology and, obviously, a reality behind it. Revelations were operations executed by the communist specialists, giving the masses the "true picture" of the reality behind the façade manufactured by the ruling classes.

One way to see them is as *demystifications*. In every situation and especially in those that have something to do with salient issues for the masses, the propagandist must go behind the surface, to demonstrate to the masses what the true realities are, and how to interpret them, once demystified. Propagandists are able to do that because they are trained and equipped with the proper tools (Marxism). That always means presenting the case in terms of class struggle. Anything else deviating from this method and its predetermined conclusion was deemed as superficial and not helping the cause. Domenach offers one of the most concise and effective accounts of the procedure: "A war, a strike, or a political scandal furnish him opportunities; more often the propagandist will work from more trivial and concrete facts in order

to connect what appeared to be only an accident to a general political explanation, which is, of course, that of the Communist party" (Domenach 1951, 266).

It is evident that the structure and logic of a denunciation remain the same even if the pivot of the exercise changes from Marxism, class, capitalism, and so forth, to anything else that the ideocratic system or ideology deems to be central. It is a general formula. A propagandist trained and equipped with the proper tools (Marxism, critical race theory, eco-feminism, antisemitism, etc.) could easily connect and combine different ideological dimensions, getting even more angles of attack and ammunition. Then denunciations could operate with an increased combinatorial capacity at the intersection of the several ideological and propaganda streams.

Let us focus now on the second pillar of the organization of propaganda and indoctrination operations, the one defined by the so-called slogans. Understanding the nature of the propaganda and indoctrination institutions requires us to be aware that, again, the issue of slogans is not left to chance by the communists. It is a domain well thought of as a matter of organization and practical effectiveness. As Domenach explains, the slogan, or watchword, is the combative and constructive aspect of propaganda. It is "the verbal translation of one phase of the revolutionary tactic." It is action- and context-oriented, "a driving concept, expressing as clearly, briefly, and euphonically as possible the most important objective of the moment" (Domenach 1951, 267). Examples of slogans should be always seen in conjunction with their circumstantial objective. If the objective is to rally the masses and overthrow a regime or government, then the appropriate slogans are "All Power to the Soviets," "Land and Peace," "Bread, Peace and Liberty," "For a Liberal, Democratic Government," and so on. If, however, one wants to consolidate the grip on power, then the appropriate slogans are "Stabilization," "Socialist Edification," "To Reach and Exceed the Plan in Four Years," and so on (Domenach 1951, 267). The domain of slogans is always dynamic and contextual. Hence, it requires continuous attention and an alert management.

The management and calibration is always a function of what was called *the political line*. The Political Line was a prerogative of the Communist Party, which had the authority and monopoly in dictating it. Needless to say, its content and direction are given by the contextual interests of the Party. Those interests, as already noted, have no bounds in morality. Morality itself is subdued to the political line. The political line is driven by an ongoing strategic rationality functionalism exercise of calibrating discourse and power politics to the evolving circumstances. "Every slogan," said Lenin, "must be deduced from the sum of the particularities of a given political situation" (Domenach 1951, 267). Each slogan has to operate between or with two factors: the political situation and the level of mass consciousness. It has to connect and stir the masses and, for that, it has to address their consciousness as well as their latent desires or fears, as stirred by the related contextual evolutions. Again, the possible extension for comparative reasons to other phenomena, from the same

family, is evident. Especially interesting in this respect are the contemporary developments in an era of twenty-four-hour news cycles, the internet, algorithms, memes, and social networks.

Now that we have a clearer view of the basic ingredients and building blocks from which propaganda campaigns are organized, let us take a look at the functional roles required by these ingredients. Because, again, as one may expect, communists followed a certain method and organizational logic at this level as well. The task of propagating "revelations" and "slogans" requires in each case a particular approach, with its specific techniques and training. The result of this basic fact of further specialization and division of labor was the emergence of two subtypes of specialists: the propagandists and the agitators.

Georgi Plekhanov is considered to be the one who introduced the classical definition of each. On the one hand, the role of the propagandist is to inculcate many ideas into a single person or to a small number of persons. On the other hand, the agitator inculcates only a single idea or a small number of ideas. By contrast, however, he inculcates them to a whole mass of people. That goes back to Lenin, who elaborated the modus operandi and the division of labor between the two agents of communism. The agitator identifies a social problem and diagnoses it unfailingly as one of the egregious results of capitalism, rousing "discontent and indignation against the crying injustice, leaving to the propagandist the responsibility of giving a complete explanation for the contradiction." As a result, "the propagandist works principally through the written word and the agitator through the spoken word" (Domenach 1951, 268).

The next level is of a purely organizational nature. The agitator and propagandist were not fully effective if their efforts were not followed up by the "organization" of the targeted group or community. Again, this approach originated with Lenin: Communists were urged to engage the people, "to go into all classes of the population as propagandists, as agitators, and as organizers" and to mold the society in ways congruous with the communist designs. Denunciations and political revelations were used to prepare the way for "political organization," which basically meant creating core groups responding to the Communist Party Political Line, if possible, both in thought and action. To achieve this, explained Lenin, the entire fabric of the country's social system needs to be penetrated: "[I]t is necessary that we have 'our men' . . . everywhere and always in all social strata, in every position which will enable them to see and understand the internal springs of the state mechanism" (Domenach 1951, 269). Thus, while acting as revolutionary forces against a government or regime, the agents of communism are operating as a disciplined, methodical apparatus.

In brief, following these principles, the communists (operating as a revolutionary antiregime force) were in the position to construct an unprecedented system of propaganda and agitation targeting the proletariat, the peasantry, and the army, and penetrating education and state institutions. In the initial stage, the objective was to undermine social order and to create confusion, strife, and demobilization. But once

the revolution had been won—or imposed by Soviet tanks in Eastern Europe—this type of activity was not discontinued. On the contrary, it was recalibrated, amplified, and intensified. It entered into a new stage. Political commissars (now called *ideological workers*) were sent to attend and shape public events, to insert themselves into public life, in mass media, in art and intellectual and cultural milieus, in factories, communities, villages, and professional associations. Communist propaganda and indoctrination cells became not the exception but the rule, in all aspects of society and polity. The result was "a vast psycho-political system which, through press, radio, theatre, films, local and factory bulletins, conferences, meetings, and the like, was able to reach into all corners of the country" (Domenach 1951, 271).

And thus, once the Communist Party took control of the political system, all agitation, propaganda, and indoctrination activities and strategies were immediately redefined, reorganized, and recalibrated to the new circumstances. At the same time, they were institutionalized as a key component of the Party-State apparatus. Explaining both the continuities and the discontinuities of organizational forms within the new circumstances of "communism in power" is a separate project in itself. For our purposes it is important only to reemphasize the importance of the microlevel organizational perspective for understanding the processes associated with the institutionalization of indoctrination and for analyzing and assessing these processes. In conjunction with the systemic and functionalist perspectives, the organizational perspectives offer a powerful set of theoretical lenses helping us not only to analyze specific historical cases and phenomena but also to discern general patterns associated with the institutionalization of indoctrination and propaganda.

Conclusion

This article has used in an explanatory way several sets of conceptual lenses to illuminate some of the key features of the phenomena associated with the institutionalization of indoctrination and propaganda. Among its main objectives is to open up the path for a comparative analysis of ideocratic totalitarianism, including its manifestations in forms and circumstances distinct from the standard, well-known cases of National Socialism, communism, and fascism, typically used as illustrations in the literature. The set of three types of conceptualization—systemic, functional, and organizational—as well as the rich insights derived from the communist historical experience offer a solid grounding for the research program on these lines. Looking ahead, two possible major directions emerge as salient.

The first possible direction is to extend the analysis by looking at a larger pool of historical cases. In his work, Bernholz bolstered his interpretation with a survey of the empirical evidence. In his inventory of the relevant historical cases closest to the ideal type implied by his models of the totalitarianism–ideocracy continuum, he identified and listed as mature ideocracies regimes such as those of Saudi Arabia and Iran (and in the past, the Jesuit state in Paraguay and the Massachusetts Puritans), whereas

the list of totalitarian systems comprised the Soviet Union, China, Nazi Germany, Cambodia, North Korea, Eastern Europe, Cuba, and the Islamic State. Following this line of broad comparative analysis may be a fruitful direction, indeed. That being said, the next immediate step in comparative analysis may be a more focused one: Eastern Europe communist countries. One could be even more specific, through a focus on higher education systems. The study of the institution of the ideological commissar and the way it operated in universities and research centers in communism may thus be a very constructive topic for the next steps of the research agenda.

At the same time, there is a second direction, suggesting a similarly challenging approach. A striking question is whether the presence of any of the traits associated with ideocracy in a liberal democratic or simply nonauthoritarian system denotes a possible incipient trend toward totalitarianism. That is a crucial question for comparative analysis, as it suggests the possibility that a social or political system may move in a totalitarian direction, in a sequence of stages, starting from different sectors of the society in small and partial steps to gradually extend to the level of taking over the entire system. That observation, correlated to the remark that there are some intrinsic connections between these traits, reinforcing each other, makes for a fascinating and frightening set of conjectures. We may thus see emerging a fresh research agenda looking at totalitarianism manifested not just in systemic state- or national-level regimes but also in more localized and personalized organizational or sectorial forms, in various social and historical circumstances.

Two more observations, first made by Friedrich and Brzezinski (1965), may be essential for this potential line of research. First, Friedrich and Brzezinski draw our attention, as already noted, to the fact that totalitarianism is intertwined with technology and technological progress. Progress in communication technologies or developments of an institutional technology nature (such as those related to bureaucratization, rationalization, and span of authority management) facilitate and are instrumental to the objective of total control, with a view of imposing an ideology defined by a supreme value and of remodeling human beings starting from their consciousness. The first decade of the twenty-first century was the stage of remarkable evolutions in this respect, especially due to the rapid development in the area of information technologies. The associated mutations in the forms and patterns of ideocratic–totalitarianism that were unquestionably induced by these changes are absolutely remarkable and deserve to be better investigated and understood. The second observation with a huge promise for comparative analysis comes from Friedrich and Brzezinski's insistence that the ways totalitarianism started to define itself for the public (and even for its own agents) were increasingly shaped in the second half of the twentieth century by the vocabulary and sensitivities of modern liberal democracy. Totalitarianism, as noted by Andrei Znamenski (2021), is increasingly presented by its supporters as a natural extension of democracy. It is advocated as the true form of liberal democracy, either the fulfillment or the transcendence of standard classical Western liberal democracy. That perspective has important implications for all

practical purposes as the entire vocabulary of liberal democracy is taken over and its semantics is altered. Doublespeak and the falsification of beliefs—two phenomena strongly associated with totalitarianism (Kuran 1997)— are thus further facilitated. How all these phenomena play in conjunction with the momentous developments induced by the information technology and artificial intelligence revolution emerges as one of the most significant and consequential research agendas in contemporary political, moral, and social sciences.

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